

Department of Corrections assumption of restitution collection

During fiscal years 2001 and 2002, the Department of Corrections Accounting Bureau participated in a pilot project with the Department of Revenue and Butte Silver Bow County to collect restitution from adult offenders convicted of felonies in District Court. Prior to the Department's pilot project all adult offender felony restitution was collected at the county level. Depending on the county, either the Clerk of Court or the County Attorney's Office collected and dispersed restitution payments to victims. As you can imagine each county had a unique way of collecting and dispersing restitution. Department Probation and Parole Officers found it difficult to obtain consistent information related to an offender's restitution payment history. Because Officer's received information from the counties quarterly, they often times did not have current up to date information related to the offender's efforts to address their restitution obligation. Thus the Department decided to try a pilot with Silver Bow County.

Restitution collection pilot project for Silver Bow County was very successful. Probation and Parole officers received current information related to an offender's account and were therefore able to hold the offender accountable. In addition, victims were also better served, as they began to receive more consistent restitution payments. As a result of this success, the Department with the support of the County Clerk of Courts Association decided to approach the 2003 legislative body requesting approval to collect all adult offender felony restitution ordered in District Court for the entire state.

Given that the Department's assumption of the collection of restitution has grown by 16% annually, one can conclude that offenders are being held more accountable and victim's are receiving payments they might not have otherwise received. During FY2006 victims received over 2.8 million dollars. Since the programs inception in October of 2003, 5.9 million dollars have been dispersed to victims of crime throughout the state of Montana.

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January 9, 2007